

SENATE BILL 3220  
By Burchett

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49,  
Chapter 6, Part 12, relative to high school  
curriculum.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 12, is amended by  
adding the following as a new, appropriately designated section:

Section 49-6-12\_\_.

(a) Every four-year high school which receives public funds from city,  
county, or state government may make available an elective course in the history  
and literature of the old testament era and an elective course in the history and  
literature of the new testament era.

(b) The purpose of such courses shall be to accommodate the rights and  
desires of those teachers and students who wish to teach and study the old and  
new testaments and to familiarize students with the contents of the old and new  
testaments, the history recorded by the old and new testaments, the literary style  
and structure of the old and new testaments, the customs and cultures of the  
peoples and societies recorded in the old and new testaments, and the influence  
of the old and new testaments upon law, history, government, literature, art,  
music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

(c) Before February 1, 2007, the state board of education shall adopt a  
curriculum for each course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson  
plans, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of this  
section.

(d) The book or collection of books commonly known as the old testament shall serve as the basic text for the history and literature of the old testament era course. The course topics may include:

- (1) The historical background and events of the period;
- (2) The history of the kingdom of Israel;
- (3) The poetry of the old testament; and
- (4) The influence of old testament history and literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events, including recent and current events in the middle east.

(e) The book or collection of books commonly known as the new testament shall serve as the basic text for the history and literature of the new testament era course. The course topics may include:

- (1) The historical background and events of the period;
- (2) The life of Jesus of Nazareth;
- (3) The parables of Jesus;
- (4) The life and travels of Paul; and
- (5) The influence of new testament history and literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events.

(f) The courses shall:

- (1) Familiarize students with the customs and cultures of the times and places referred to in the old and new testament books;
- (2) Familiarize students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the old and new testament books were written and the means by which they were preserved;
- (3) Familiarize students with the languages in which the old and new testament books were written and into which they were translated;

(4) Familiarize students with the historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the old and new testament books into the English language;

(5) Be taught in an objective and non-devotional manner with no attempt made to indoctrinate the students as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or as the correct interpretation thereof;

(6) Not include the instruction of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible; and

(7) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

(g) Students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious and cultural traditions.

(h) The local board of education may determine which version of the old or new testament shall be used as the main text or, if the local board of education does not do so, that determination may be made by the teacher of the course.

(i) No student shall be required to use one (1) version as the sole text of the old or new testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a different version of the old or new testament from that chosen by the local board of education or teacher, he or she shall be permitted to do so.

(j) The provisions of this title relating to personnel employed by local education agencies, including without limitation certification requirements, employment and supervision shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this section. In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation or lack of affiliation, or criteria

involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible. Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be determined by the local boards of education.

(k) A local board of education may monitor the content and instruction of the courses as it deems appropriate.

(l) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of a local board of education to offer courses regarding the old testament or the new testament that are not in accordance with this section; provided, however, that no state funds distributed pursuant to this section shall be expended in connection with such a course that does not meet the requirements of this section.

(m) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit local boards of education from offering elective courses based upon the books of other religions or societies. In determining whether to offer such courses, the local board may consider various factors including, but not limited to, student and parent demand for such courses and the impact such books have had upon history and culture.

SECTION 2. If any provisions of this act or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of the act which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to that end the provisions of this act are declared to be severable.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2006, the public welfare requiring it.